

The Serbo-Croatian War, 1991-1995: Vision of Ukrainian Minority in Croatia

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Abstract

This article considers the situation of the Ruthenian-Ukrainian diaspora in Croatia during the Serbo-Croatian War (1991-1995). The specifics of Rusyn and Ukrainian attitude to opposing parties are covered, an evolution of their sights concerning the War is shown. The policy of the self-proclaimed Republic of Serbian Krajina towards national minorities is characterized. The consequences of the Serbo-Croatian War on the situation of the Ukrainian diaspora in Croatia are analyzed.

Keywords: Croatia, Ruthenian-Ukrainian minority, diaspora, Mikluševci, Petrovci, Serbo-Croatian War, terror, ethnic cleansing, deportations

1. Introduction

The Serbo-Croatian War (1991-1995), along with Bosnian (1992-1995), marked the collapse of socialist Yugoslavia. Even today both Serbians and Croats have different sight on the nature and character of this war: the former believe it is civil, and the latter believe it is a national liberation war. Each side sees an aggressor in their opponent and considers themselves as a victim. However, when studying the specifics of this war, researchers usually drop out of their sight national minorities, which lived in Croatian Danube region (Eastern Slavonia) – territory, that became one of the crucial Serbo-Croatian battlefields.

As of 1991, Croatia was a multinational country, where national minorities made up 22% of the populace [2]. One of the oldest minorities there was the Ukrainian diaspora. The study of this minority's ground, its perception of the war, and the relation to the opposing parties is the goal of this research paper. Information about Croatian national minorities' viewpoint of the Serbo-Croatian War, especially those who were at the epicenter of warfare, can help with a better and more objective understanding of the matter of this conflict better.

The Serbo-Croatian War is the most favorite topic of Croatian historiography of the entire period of independence (D. Marijan [22], V. Šakić [31], Z. Raboteg-Šarić, A. Brajša-Žganec [32], J. Jurčević [13], S. Rihtar [29] and others). However, it had been considered foremost as a confrontation between Croats and Serbs. The question about the state of the Croatian national minorities during the war was covered only by few researchers (S. Tatalović [43], A. B. Szekely [36]). Concerning the Ukrainian minority itself, we have only a few pieces of research in journalistic or memoir genre. (S. Burda [7], Đ. Biki [4]). In general, none of the researchers has comprehensively considered the problem of the situation of the Ukrainian diaspora in Croatia during the Serbo-Croatian War of 1991-1995 and the perception of this war by the local Ukrainian population.

2. The main body

The Ukrainian diaspora in Croatia has its features. People from Ukrainian land, which had moved to Croatian territory in the middle of XVIII century, were identified as Rusyns (Ruthenians). Those, who appeared there later, identified themselves as Ukrainians. Both the first and the second managed to keep their name, language and customs in the new environment.

Generally, Rusyns and Ukrainians are two ethnonyms for one national minority: “Rusyn” – is the old name, “Ukrainian” – the new one. The transition from the position of Ruthenianism to the position of Ukrainianness was experienced at different times by the entire Ukrainian people. In the Naddniproshchyna region, this process was especially active from the middle of the XVII century, in Galychyna – in the second half of the XIX century, in

Zakarpattia – in the first half of the XX century. After that, only the population of the outlying Ukrainian territories that did not enter the Ukrainian state continued to call themselves Rusyns.

Therefore, it is clear why this process did not affect the South Slavic Rusyns: in the XVIII century it had not yet reached the Carpathians (from where was the emigration to the Balkans), and in the twentieth century the Rusyns were isolated from their homeland [3, p. 34].

The conservation of group identity by immigrants from the first waves of migration and, as a result, the incompleteness of ethno-consolidating processes among the Ukrainian diaspora led to the fact that Ukrainians by origin in the former Yugoslavia now use two ethnonyms – “Rusyns“ and „Ukrainians“.

Afterward, they had created several cultural societies, which were coordinated since 1968 by the Union of Rusyns and Ukrainians of Croatia.

According to the criteria of perception of their Ukrainian origin, the community of Croatian Rusyns in the second half of the XX century can be divided into two main currents: those who recognized their belonging to the Ukrainian nation, and those who considered their own origin purely “Rusyn”, but not Ukrainian [30, p. 192]. Ukrainians recognized the feature of the Rusyn language but called it a dialect, emphasizing the Rusyns belonging to their nation.

Since the author takes the position that Rusyns are a branch of the Ukrainian people, in this article we will consider the general Ruthenian-Ukrainian community.

Throughout the twentieth century the Ruthenian-Ukrainian minority in Croatia was small, and the number of those who called themselves so gradually decreased. By an official census of 1991 in Croatia lived 3253 Rusyns and 2494 Ukrainians, which altogether numbered 0,2% of all the population of the republic [35, p. 64]. Ukrainians and Rusyns mostly lived in Slavonia (eastern part of Croatia, bordering Serbia) and in Zagreb.

The condition of Rusyns and Ukrainians was significantly influenced by the military aggression of YPA (Yugoslav People’s Army) and Serbian paramilitary formations against Croatia. Attempts by the new Croatian government, led by Franjo Tudjman, to secede from socialist Yugoslavia met with opposition from both the Yugoslav leadership and the reluctance of Croatian Serbs to support the disintegration of the SFR Yugoslavia. As early as the summer of 1990, the local Serb population, which accounted for the majority of Croatia's 11 administrative districts out of 101, launched the so-called “barricade revolution” - a process of disobedience to the Croatian authorities. And after Croatia adopted the Declaration of Independence on May 25, 1991, and with the transition of the regular Yugoslav armed forces across the Danube in July, a full-scale war broke out. Rusyns and Ukrainians already in 1991 found themselves on the frontline, at the battlefield epicenter.

Because of military campaigns at the end of 1991, Croatian Serbs under the protection of YPA (at that time de-facto – regular forces of Serbian army) completely separated from Croatia, taking a quarter of its territory under control.

During 1990-91 the constitution of self-proclaimed Serbian state formations took place, which proclaimed the formation of the Republic of Serbian Krajina by merging so-called Serb Autonomous Region Krajina and Autonomous Region Slavonia, Baranja, and Western Sylvania [23, pp. 53–55]. M. Babić became the President of Republic Serbian Krajina.

On January 2, 1992, an agreement on an unconditional ceasefire entered into force and the front stabilized. While the main task for the Serbian Krajina in the following years was to seek recognition from the world community, to unite with Serbia or to join Yugoslavia as an independent entity, for the Croatian authorities it was to regain the lost territories.

The newly established Serbian administrative units occupied the territory where a large part of the non-Serb population lived. Military actions covered the area, where 80% of all the Rusyns and Ukrainians of Croatia habited [17, p. 18]. In particular, most of the descendants of immigrants from Ukrainian lands were in a city named Vukovar, villages Petrovci and Mikluševci (Eastern Slavonia) Those were the only villages, where representatives of the Ruthenian-Ukrainian diaspora were the vast majority of the population: in Petrovci from almost 1300 residents 737 were Rusyns and 230 – Ukrainians [5, p. 41; 39, p. 24] (according to other data – more than 1000 Rusyns and nearly 300 Ukrainians [33, p. 26]), in Mikluševci from more than 670 residents, according to different data, Rusyns and Ukrainians numbered 523–529 people [4, p. 11; 5, p. 41]. The rest of the villages’ residents were Serbs and Croats. Total in Eastern Slavonia lived 60% of the Ruthenian-Ukrainian diaspora [9].

Rusyns and Ukrainians traditionally had little interest in politics. They were mostly represented by agrarians and raised for decades on principles of „brotherhood and unity“ in Yugoslavia, so most of them did not show much political activity until a certain time and did not take a clear position on the Croatian-Serbian conflicts.

The exception was the politics of their representative body – the Union of Rusyns and Ukrainians of Croatia. Leaders of the Union welcomed the changes that took place at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s in Croatia, especially the promise of a new government (anti-communist and anti-Serb in content) led by President F. Tudjman to support and protect the interests of national minorities [11].

The stability in lands, inhabited by Rusyns and Ukrainians, was ended by holding a referendum on the independence of Croatia in May 1991. Rusyns and Ukrainians mostly advocated the separation of the republic from Yugoslavia. In mostly Rusyn villages Petrovci and Mikluševci the number of people, who voted for the Croatian independence, was almost 64 and 73% of those, who took part in the voting [19, p. 113].

With the beginning of the full-scale Serbo-Croatian War in July 1991, Rusyns and Ukrainians took an active part in Croatian sovereignty defense. By mid-November 1991, 180 Rusyns and Ukrainians from Vukovar were fighting at the front-line [14]. When the war reached Western Slavonia in September 1991, Ukrainians from Lipovlyany were among the first to join the newly formed voluntary defense units without waiting for official mobilization [20].

At the same time, most of Petrovci and Mikluševci residents stayed neutral. Peasants believed, that YPA is still an army of the Yugoslav nations, and these soldiers were expected to be tolerant to them as to ordinary people who were distant and foreigner to political games. As the front-line approached, they persuaded the defenders of the villages to retreat to save these localities from shelling and destruction [39, p. 27].

At the end of September 1991, the two villages were occupied by YPA and Serbian paramilitary formations. Initially, the attitude of Rusyn peasants to the soldiers was tolerant, without serious incidents. They had to promise to cooperate with the army and the local newly created government [4, p. 44; 37, pp. 21, 23].

However, the hopes of the villagers that the war would no longer affect them did not come true.

The non-Serb population of Serbian Krajina (including Rusyns and Ukrainians) found itself on the path of a „Serbisation“ policy of the occupied territories. So basically an occupation regime was established for Rusyns and Ukrainians of this region. Destruction, looting, rape, beatings, damage to the Greek Catholic Church, „ethnic cleansing“, brutal killings of particular families – this is the list of actions of the new government [4, p. 80].

Historical relations between Serbs and Rusyns do not provide any grounds for explaining what was happening on the territory of the so-called RSK. One of the reasons for the negative attitude of Serbs towards Rusyns and Ukrainians was that they were Uniates. Because the Croatian-Serbian war had, among other slogans, a religious one, the entire non-Orthodox population was perceived by the Serbs as hostile. Although there is no evidence for 250 years that Rusyn and Ukrainian Uniates converted Serbs to Catholicism; on the contrary, there was a reverse trend.

The roots of antipathy can be traced to World War II. At the beginning, the general tendency of the Ukrainian community in Yugoslavia was to remain neutral. Peaceful Ukrainians had no choice, because taking a certain position was dangerous for the existence of the whole community. However, as a result of this policy, Ukrainians were subject to constant suspicion of collaborating with one of the warring parties, which was also a cause of violence and terror [30, p. 163].

Another factor in the policy of the so-called RSK is related to the intervention of the world community in the conflict. The new government sought to change the ethnic map of the region as soon as possible (before the war Serbs were only 9% of Petrovci's population and less than 11% of Mikluševci's population [6, p. 43; 41, p. 13]), making it ethnically pure (exclusively Serbian) before the arrival of UN peacekeepers to prove to the world community rights to these lands.

Ukrainians and Rusyns were not the only ones who suffered from Serbs. In Eastern Slavonia, Hungarians, Czechs, Slovaks, Gypsies (Roma), and others experienced the same. Thus, in Vojvodina, the Serbian authorities forcibly mobilized the Hungarian population to fight in fact against their compatriots in Croatia. Hungarian-language teaching in schools ceased, and Hungarians in the Danube region were forced to leave en masse for their historical homeland, as did Czechs and Slovaks. The newly formed Serbian leadership accused the Germans of reviving Nazism, the Roma of looting, and so on.

As of March 23, 1992, 678 houses, 32 cultural and sacred sites, and 6 schools had been destroyed or abandoned in the territories of the Ruthenian-Ukrainian minority (both occupied and simply affected by the war). 560 cases

of theft of agricultural machinery and cars were recorded [26, p. 4]. The three most powerful cultural and artistic societies of Rusyns and Ukrainians ceased to exist. Eight Greek Catholic parishes were closed and local priests were expelled [49]. At the same time, the Serbian Orthodox churches in Mikluševci and Petrovci were not damaged. Serbs were accusing Rusyns and Ukrainians of the region of opportunistic support for each new government. Dusanka Mislenovic, a Serb resident of Mikluševci, said: "You know, our Rusyns are like sunflowers. Tadjman came to power - they are with him, because Tadjman promised them land, housing and new machinery. And now that Tadjman is gone, they are all with Yugoslavia. Now they demand to be accepted by the army, and say that they are innocent and loyal residents of their village. Whatever government comes – they will be with it. You know, we don't want to live with such people: either they or we. When we, Serbs, go through the countryside, they turn away and laugh. We don't want that. All the guilty must leave the village... We don't want to live with people like that. We did not force them to leave, they were simply tempted by Tadjman's promises, no other reason. The Rusyns kept shouting, "Down with the Communists!". However they managed to do well when the communists were in power" [4, p. 44].

The Rusyns did not experience such terror, which was carried out by the Territorial Defense headquarters, during all 150 years of their stay on these lands.

After the fall of Vukovar, the YPA and the Chetniks, entering the city, organized a massacre. During which 25 representatives of Ukrainian and Ruthenian nationalities were killed [12; 49]. After the seizure of the city by YPA units, all non-Serb men, regardless of personal beliefs, religion or party affiliation, were interned in special camps. Nobody was allowed to reach imprisoned Rusyns and Ukrainians. The living conditions there were unbearable. Thus, one Ukrainian, a defender of Vukovar, was held captive for 145 days, during which time he was summoned 20 times for interrogation and lost 35 kilograms. After his release from captivity, even his family did not recognize him [24].

It was allowed to enter Vukovar only with special passes. Some Rusyns and Ukrainians who worked in this city at the hospital or at the funeral were killed in order to get rid of unwanted witnesses.

When a resident of Vukovar asked the new authorities to rebuild the destroyed house, they first inquired about her nationality. And when they heard that she was Ukrainian, the Serbian authorities replied: "Ukrainians?! What house are you looking for here? There is no house here for you! Go back to where you came from!" [1].

The Mikluševci's Territorial Defense headquarters compiled a list of 150 people to be evicted [4, p. 41]. Several times the new government drove elderly people, women and children into the center of the village, intimidating them with deportation. Armed representatives of the new authorities fired at houses at night, threw grenades in the yards. Only stationed units of the YPA (about 2,000 Yugoslav soldiers per 600 local peasants who remained at the time) stopped such staff initiatives [38, p. 10].

A curfew was imposed in Ruthenian-Ukrainian villages, interrogations and torture were carried out. Free movement through the countryside was limited: to go out into the field or from the village at all was allowed only with a pass. In fact, you could only move freely in your own backyard.

The new government looted bypasses, confiscated agricultural vehicles and valuables, or forced them to sell them for meager prices. Cars, tractors, combines, furniture, machinery, etc. were exported from the territory of Slavonia to Serbia.

Armed forces occupied the largest and best houses in the village. In Mikluševci, about 3,500 YPA soldiers and paramilitary units (of which the regular army was represented by only 200 soldiers at the end of January 1992, mostly reservists) looted and confiscated everything they wanted and even raped an 80-year-old woman [4, pp. 47-48].

At least 100 local villagers were interrogated and tortured in Petrovci [40, pp. 14-16]. People were suspected of staying longer on streets or communicating there, especially in Ruthenian or Ukrainian. Frequent searches were carried out under the cause of searching for weapons or a radio station. During the searches, each family had to stand outside motionless at gunpoint. The Serbian military often accused the Mikluševci villagers of concealing weapons, which they planted themselves. Unsuccessful searches resulted in Serbs confiscating valuables.

There was a constant confiscation of property or its forced purchase at discounted prices. Cattle were taken from some and divided among those who, according to the new government, deserved it. In Mikluševci, the Serbian authorities ordered the villagers to bring their tractors, ostensibly for inspection, and then simply confiscated them.

The people of Petrovci and Mikluševci were actually starving, despite the fact that the local Rusyns from Vojvodina handed them humanitarian aid. However, it settled in the Petrovci store, where only Serbs could buy.

Even if Rusyns and Ukrainians were allowed to buy things there, they still had no money left, because they were taken away by the new government.

But there were those, who had strong and constant pro-Serbian sympathies. Mostly they were the old communists who lost power upon the villages in the new democratic elections of 1990 in Croatia and with the establishment of the YPA and Serbian armed forces hoped to regain it [37, p. 22].

That is how Rusyns entered the new occupation administration on the ground. Territorial Defense (TD) headquarters were organized in each settlement occupied by the YPA and insurgent Serbs, which included individual Rusyns and Ukrainians who sympathized with official Belgrade [4, p. 65].

Due to active collaboration with Serbs, some Rusyns from Mikluševci lived well under Serbian authority. They opened shops, hotels, businesses. Individual Rusyns from Mikluševci, at the behest of local Serbs, tortured fellow villagers and helped to deport them. According to the expelled locals, the hardest thing for them was not to accept the Serbian occupation itself, but the betrayal of their compatriots [4, pp. 69, 84].

There was also a forced collaborationism. Due to the compact location of Ukrainians in the border areas between Serbia and Croatia, during the war a large number of Ukrainian men were mobilized to the YPA or the Croatian forces, depending on the place of residence [4, pp. 49–50].

The tragedy of the situation of people of Ukrainian origin is big. Those, who were called to the military formations of their states, were forced to fight against their compatriots on the opposite side. Moreover, the hostile parties executed Ukrainian prisoners only because they were forcibly mobilized into enemy forces [21, pp. 17–18].

Most Rusyns and Ukrainians managed to become a defense of Croatian statehood. A total of 410 Rusyns and Ukrainians fought in the Croatian army [17, p. 19], which was the largest percentage of the military compared to other national minorities. Not unusually, the government of Serbian Krajina deported Ukrainians under the context of their cooperation with the Croatian authorities.

The Serbo-Croatian War intensified interethnic antagonism, led to the practice of "ethnic cleansing" due to the policy of the self-proclaimed Republic of Serbian Krajina. The most massive and resonant were deportations of Rusyns and Ukrainians in 1992 from Petrovci (March 22, more than 110 people), Vukovar (April 21, 52 people), Mikluševci (May 18, almost 100 people) [12]. As of May 1992, there were more than 2,000 exiles, 280 refugees, and 310 missing Rusyns and Ukrainians [47].

The new government primarily considered extremists those peasants who fled before the arrival of the YPA and did not return within the period announced by it (48 hours) [4, p. 55]. Thus, their property was confiscated and their families were evicted. In practice, it did not matter whether the suspects were sympathizers of Croatia. The main thing was whether they owned large property that could be looted. People were expelled under the pretext of cooperating with the enemy and on the basis of property: first of all, the wealthy, so that Serbs could be settled in their homes. Those who had relatives in the Croatian armed forces were also evicted.

When compiling the eviction lists, the new government did not include only the elderly. The rest were evicted under the slogan "there is no other choice, either we or they". Although later they did not look at age.

During the eviction of Petrovci residents, 53 houses, 120 hectares of land, 31 tractors, 12 cars and 2 trucks were confiscated from them [5, p. 41]. The Serbs, threatening with weapons, gave the locals 15 minutes to assemble and ordered them to leave their homes immediately, taking only documents, money and valuables with them. All deportees were forcibly signed statements that they were moving to Croatia voluntarily, and that all their property was being handed over to the Serbian authorities. In case of refusal to evict, the citizens of Petrovci were threatened with immediate destruction. Authorities said that anyone who returned would be killed. Even mixed Ruthenian-Serbian and Ukrainian-Serbian families were evicted. Some peasants resisted because they had once served in the Yugoslav army and, according to them, did not want to leave Yugoslavia. On the way, the bus was stopped by Serbian soldiers and, taking even what the people of Petrovci had managed to take with them, they sent them to Bosnia [10; 18].

Similar cruelty took place in Mikluševci. From them were confiscated 15 houses, at least 300 hectares of land, 24 tractors, 4 combines, 7 cars, 2 trucks [49] (according to other sources – 45 houses, 300 hectares of land, 28 tractors, 6 combines, 12 cars and 3 trucks [5, p. 41]). To intimidate the peasants, the three richest residents of Mikluševci were killed. All people were given 10 minutes to assemble, otherwise they were threatened to be killed if disobedient [46]. It was allowed to take only the essentials, and even that was taken away by road.

Actually, from 6,000 Rusyns and Ukrainians almost 50% were forced to leave their homes [17, p. 19]. If we compare these numbers with the information of V. Šakić [32, pp. 393, 394], we can come to the conclusion that

among the refugees and exiles of non-Croatian and non-Serb nationalities, Rusyns and Ukrainians accounted for more than 25%. Exiles and refugees were scattered in 42 settlements in Croatia, as well as literally on all continents [17, p. 19].

The arrival of UN peacekeepers has hardly changed the situation. Vice versa, the latter simply tried not to notice the facts of continued discrimination against non-Serbs. In particular, the expulsion of residents from Petrovci on March 22, 1992, took place with the acquiescence of the Russian battalion, and in the forced eviction of Rusyns from Mikluševci peacekeepers from the UN helped by bus [27]. The passivity of the peacekeepers was called by some leaders of the Ruthenian-Ukrainian community in Croatia the quiet support of Serbian paramilitary groups. The peacekeepers, in particular, were accused of trafficking in Serbs [16].

Serbian aggression interrupted classes in several schools where the language of Ruthenians and Ukrainians was taught. For several years, no child studied in their native language [25].

In Vukovar, all three schools taught in Ruthenian and Ukrainian were destroyed (including textbooks, equipment and inventory). In Petrovci, the school building, inventory, equipment, and textbooks were damaged. A similar situation has developed in Mikluševci [42, p. 19].

Founded on part of Croatian territory, the Serbian Krajina adopted a number of constitutional acts that also addressed educational issues. Thus, the Constitutional Law on the Proclamation of Serbian Krajina stated that the Serbian language is used in official use in the region; the official use of Croatian and other national minority languages was allowed in those municipalities where at least 8% of all inhabitants spoke such languages; it was emphasized that there were no restrictions on the use of languages in the private sphere [15, p. 26].

Serbian aggression negatively affected the process of learning the language of Rusyns and Ukrainians in schools in the Vukovar region. During the 7-year occupation, which is almost a whole generation of students, schoolchildren in Eastern Slavonia went to Serbian schools and studied according to the Serbian curriculum.

Some teachers (Myroslav Nad', Myron Stracensky [19, p. 20]) died, and most became refugees or exiles and found themselves in different parts of Croatia. Those who remained in the occupied territories were fired from schools without explanation (in fact for political and national reasons) and lost their jobs during the occupation. The new school leadership in Petrovci and Mikluševci viewed Rusyns and Ukrainians as hostile elements, as if they were Ustashas and supporters of the CDU (Croatian Democratic Union – ruling party in Croatia in that time). Therefore, the offer of teaching in the native language in schools was categorically rejected. Moreover, Ruthenian and Ukrainian languages could not be spoken on the streets.

On the other side of the front line, the children of the exiles from Petrovci, Mikluševci and Vukovar were settled all over Croatia, so they did not have the opportunity to communicate with each other in their native language. And adult members of these families began to forget their own language, mixing it with Croatian words. Therefore, even parents could not be an example for children in learning their native language.

Young Rusyns and Ukrainians found a job in a new place and could stay there. That was a threat to such a small minority because without youth – it would have no future. There was a fear that Rusyns and Ukrainians of Croatia would disappear as a community. In addition, a large part of the elite and priests, bearers of national consciousness, found themselves in exile [4, p. 67].

Therefore, Rusyns and Ukrainians welcomed the actions of the Croatian army in May ("Flash") and August ("Storm") in 1995, with which it regained most of the lands controlled by the so-called Serbian Krajina. The return of Eastern Slavonia, where most Rusyns and Ukrainians lived, was to be done gradually and under the control of the UN Transitional Administration. On October 3, 1995, in the East Slavonian town Erdut, the Croatian government and the local Serbian leadership signed the so-called Erdut agreement with 11 points aimed at resolving disputes. Another step towards a peaceful settlement was an agreement signed on November 12, 1995 by an official Zagreb and local Serbs, with the participation of UN and US representatives, entitled "Basic Agreement on the Gradual Peaceful Reintegration of Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Srijem into Croatia's Constitutional Space» [23, p. 62].

The transitional administration was to facilitate the return of refugees and exiles who had been granted the right to restitution. In total, it was planned to return 80-100 thousand exiles (excluding Serbs) to Eastern Slavonia, including Rusyns and Ukrainians.

Erdut's agreement on the absence of the Croatian army in the Danube and the gradual reintegration of the region under UN supervision was met with disappointment by Rusyns and Ukrainians (as well as locals in general). In addition, this peacekeeping activity was not entirely effective. The peacekeepers were accused of illegal trade with

Serbs. Croatian MP M. Kiš complained that during the reintegration of the Danube region, the UN Transitional Administration pursued such a policy of returning exiles – that only Serbs returned [16].

The rapid return of Ukrainians and Rusyns was also hampered by a lack of funds from the state to rebuild housing [28]. As of September 1998, 112 of the 316 Mikluševci's residents who had exiled status had returned [8].

During the process of reintegration of the Danube region, in 1997 Sabor (the Croatian Parliament) passed the law on con-validation, i.e. on the validity and verification of legal acts of the occupying government in Eastern Slavonia, including those related to national minorities. The consequences of this law, which Croatia passed under pressure from the international community, basically legalizing the legal acts of Serbian state formations, have been felt by the diaspora for a very long time. Rusyns and Ukrainians, even with a court decision, could not return their private property and real estate they owned before the war. In fact, the law was a price to pay for peace in the region and for the rapid recognition of the Danube region as part of Croatia [48].

Marauding flourished in Petrovci: everything that was possible was taken to Serbia. A similar picture was observed in Mikluševci. Unlike the Mikluševci Rusyns, who left the village without anything during the deportations, the Serbs took everything they could [4, p. 109].

Since the middle of 1997, a complex process of return of refugees and exiles, psychological normalization of social relations, and adaptation of people to new circumstances, has continued. For a long time, there was an invisible but tangible distance between the former exiles and those who survived the occupation on the spot.

After the reintegration of the Danube region, Croatia has failed to establish an effective mechanism for punishing war criminals. Thus, the so-called «Mikluševci's process" gained considerable resonance. The case was directed against those who deported 98 and killed four people from Mikluševci in the spring of 1992 [45] (all the victims were Rusyns [50]).

The investigation was constantly delayed, and the number of defendants decreased due to the deaths of suspects or lack of evidence. At the same time, a third of them were Rusyns – residents of Mikluševci [45].

In 2009 the court found guilty 12 people (six Serbs and Rusyns) and sentenced them to 4 to 15 years in prison. But at the announcement of the sentence, only three ethnic Rusyns were present – Joakim Bučko, Zdenko Magoč, and Darko Gudak (other convicted were wanted because they had fled mainly to neighboring Serbia and were inaccessible to the Croatian judiciary) [50]. So it turned out that only Rusyns were actually convicted for the war crime of genocide against the Rusyns.

What were the total losses of Rusyns and Ukrainians during the Serbo-Croatian War?

As of March 23, 1992, 163 Rusyns and Ukrainians had died in the occupied territories, representing 24.5% of the total number of all Croatian national minorities killed [26]. At the same time, almost half of the people died after the end of active military actions [4, p. 58].

As of August 1992, 300 had died, 350 had disappeared, and 200 Rusyns and Ukrainians were in Serbian concentration camps. At the beginning of 1993, the number of killed Rusyns and Ukrainians exceeded 300, while the fate of another 400 remained unknown [34, pp. 45–46].

In Petrovci, where 737 Rusyns and 230 Ukrainians lived before the war, there were 500 and 200 of them left in 1994, respectively. Under the occupation, mortality among peasants increased significantly due to lack of food and medicine, as well as constant fear. The situation was similar in Mikluševci, where out of 493 Rusyns and 7 Ukrainians, only 200 Rusyns remained [42, p. 17].

That is, together in Petrovci and Mikluševci there were less than a thousand inhabitants. And there were almost no Rusyns and Ukrainians left in Vukovar after the deportations [12].

In general, the losses of Rusyns and Ukrainians in Croatia during the War were up to 3.5% of their population (while during World War II numbers of deceased counted 2%) [17, p. 18]. During 1991-2001, the number of Rusyns decreased by 28%, Ukrainians – by 20% [44, p. 162].

3. Conclusion

Thus, the small Ruthenian-Ukrainian community in Croatia at the beginning of the Serbo-Croatian War (1991-95) took a predominantly neutral position. However, under the authority of the self-proclaimed Republic of Serbian Krajina and subjected to "ethnic cleansing", Rusyns and Ukrainians took pro-Croatian positions. The manifestation of this is their largest part in the Croatian army (compared to other national minorities). The collaborationism of individual Rusyns and Ukrainians also took place in the Serb-occupied lands. But it did not become widespread and was explained by opportunistic reasons (enrichment, personal accounts, the struggle for survival). As half of

the Rusyns and Ukrainians in Croatia became refugees and exiles as a result of the war, this further significantly affected their accommodation and contributed to denationalization and depopulation. Therefore, the Croatian-Serbian war became the greatest tragedy in the centuries-old history of the Ruthenian-Ukrainian diaspora in Croatia.

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